

Support for S.B. No. 184 (Changes Regarding Election Administration as a Result of COVID-19 and Concerning Eligibility to Vote by Absentee Ballot) and H.B. 5262 (An Act Revising Certain Absentee Voting Eligibility Statutes)

Submitted to the Government Administration and Elections Committee, as Testimony before its Public Hearing on S.B. No. 184 and H.B. 5262 on Friday, March 4, 2022, at 10 a.m.

My name is **Cathleen Donnelly**, and I am a voter in Stamford, Connecticut. I am writing in support of **S.B. No. 184** (Changes Regarding Election Administration as a Result of COVID-19 and Concerning Eligibility to Vote by Absentee Ballot) and **H.B. 5262** (An Act Revising Certain Absentee Voting Eligibility Statutes).

I strongly believe that Connecticut's voting laws, and particularly those regarding absentee ballot voting, should align with the provisions and language in our State Constitution. Ultimately, our state's election laws should permit "no excuse" voting by absentee ballot. In 2022, at a minimum, as the COVID-19 lingers, voters at high risk, and those who fear exposure, should be permitted to vote by absentee ballot.

Over a business career of more than 45 years, professional and family commitments had the potential to impede my ability to exercise my fundamental right (and responsibility) as a U.S. citizen and a Connecticut resident – that is, to vote in support of the candidates, laws and causes I believe in. Fortunately, I had the flexibility, wherewithal, and commitment to obtain and cast my ballot; I have voted in almost every election in which I was eligible to do so.

Others, including those with less flexible working hours, caring for ill or disabled family members, or fear exposure to COVID-19, need the same flexibility.

Connecticut's current election laws are more restrictive than our State Constitution requires. H.B. 5262 in particular aligns the language in our state laws to conform with our Constitution's wording. Specifically, it expands eligibility to vote by absentee ballot to include:

- Illness in general – It removes the requirement that voters themselves must be sick and includes a new statutory interpretation of illness to include caring for a sick child, spouse, or other individual.
- Physical disability in general, so that caretakers for disabled persons can vote by absentee ballot.
- Those who are out of town during the majority of voting hours, such as those with extensive commutes that take them outside their voting districts (or even the state).

These proposed changes recognize the daily challenges today's citizens – workers, parents, caregivers, and others – face on Election Day, and provide them an expanded, and long overdue, opportunity to make their voices heard.

More than 650,000 Connecticut voters voted by absentee ballot in the 2020 CT General Election, leading to a record-breaking 80% voter turnout. Today's events, from the attack on voting rights in our

own country, to Russia's unprovoked assault on Ukraine, powerfully demonstrate that democracy and the free expression of ideas are under siege. Connecticut must stand against this and strike a blow in favor of expanding voting rights.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Cathleen Donnelly
Stamford, Connecticut
March 3, 2022

Support S.B.184 and H.B. 5262